

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 LIBREV 00530 01 OF 02 301858Z

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-14 L-03 EB-11 INR-10 SS-20 DRC-01

RSC-01 /079 W

----- 116243

P 301432Z APR 74

FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5381

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LIBREVILLE 0530

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, ETRN, GB, US

SUBJ: PRESIDENT BONGO'S DECISION TO PURCHASE DC-8 IN U.S.

REF: STATE 077438

1. HAD LONG MEETING YESTERDAY MORNING (APRIL 29) WITH PRESIDENT BONGO, OAU SECRETARY GENERAL NZO EKANGAKI, MINISTER OF STATE RAWIRI AND FONMIN OKUMBA. MUCH OF SAME GROUND COVERED AS IN EARLIER MEETING IN NEW YORK. BONGO WAS AS FIRM AS EVER BUT WAS COMPLETELY IN CONTROL AND DOMINATED MEETING WITHOUT ANY OUTBURSTS AND WITH CLEAR EFFORT TO APPEAR REASONABLE. HE MENTIONED INTER ALIA THAT NEW AIR GABON COMPANY WHICH WOULD TAKE OVER DC-8 (TO BE SERVICED AND OPERATED BY UTA) WOULD BE OWNED 60 PERCENT BY GOG, 20 PERCENT BY UTA AND 20 PERCENT BY AIR AFRIQUE. BONGO EXPLAINED AGAIN THAT HE NEEDED PLANE FOR HIS OWN OFFICIAL USE AND THAT IT WOULD BE USED BY UTA FOR ITS REGULAR SCHEDULE WHEN NOT REQUIRED BY HIM. EKANGAKI AGREED WITH EVERYTHING BONGO SAID AND STATED OAU OBVIOUSLY ACCEPTED STATEMENTS MADE BOTH ORALLY AND IN WRITING BY CHIEF OF STATE OF MEMBER NATION. THERE COULD BE NO QUESTION, HE SAID, OF OAU TAKING ANY OTHER POSITION. SOMEWHAT TO MY SURPRISE, BONGO THEN SAID TO EKANGAKI THAT, IN FAIRNESS TO AMERICAN POSITION, THERE HAD BEEN EARLIER CASE WHERE ORAL ASSURANCES HAD BEEN GIVEN BY A GABONESE MINISTER CONCERNING A DC-8 PURCHASED BY A PRIVATE

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 LIBREV 00530 01 OF 02 301858Z

COMPANY. PRESENT CASE WAS, HOWEVER, BONGO ASSURED, ENTIRELY

DIFFERENT AS HE HIMSELF HAD GIVEN HIS PERSONAL ASSURANCE ORALLY AND IN WRITING TO USG AND OAU AND PLANE WOULD BE UNDER STRICT CONTROL BY GOG. EKANGAKI READILY CONCURRED.

2. I THEN ASKED EKANGAKI WHEN USG WOULD EXPECT OAU REPLY TO ITS LETTER AFFIRMING ON PART OF OAU WHAT HE HAD JUST STATED ORALLY AT MEETING IN PRESENCE OF PRESIDENT BONGO. EKANGAKI REPLIED THAT WRITTEN REPLY TO USG FROM OAU IN WHICH OAU WOULD STATE THAT IT DID NOT OBJECT TO A PLANE SALE TO A MEMBER OF OAU NATION WAS TOTALLY INAPPROPRIATE AND INCONCEIVABLE FROM A PROCEDURAL POINT OF VIEW. IT WOULD PLACE OAU IN UNTENABLE POSITION OF PASSING JUDGMENT ON SALES OF PLANES TO ANY AND ALL OAU STATES BEFORE THEY EVEN TOOK PLACE AND WOULD REPRESENT A USURPATION OF AUTHORITY NOT WITHIN COMPETENCE OF OAU CREATING THEREBY OBVIOUSLY UNACCEPTABLE PRECEDENT. SECGEN OF OAU WAS MERELY FUNCTIONARY OF ORGANIZATION WORKING FOR CHIEFS OF STATE OF MEMBER NATIONS AND COULD NOT PRESUME TO PASS JUDGEMENT IN WRITING ON THEIR ACTIONS.

3. I POINTED OUT TO EKANGAKI THAT USG NOT ASKING OAU TO TELL GABON WHAT IT COULD OR COULD NOT DO BUT THAT IT WAS OAU WHICH HAD TAKEN INITIATIVE OF WRITING USG CONCERNING EARLIER SALE OF DC-8 AND USG MERELY ASKING OAU IF IT WOULD BE SIMILARLY CONCERNED BY PRESENT PROPOSED SALE. EKANGAKI MAINTAINED HIS POSITION THAT WHILE OAU HAD A PRIORI NO OBJECTION WHATEVER TO SALE, IT COULD NOT APPEAR BY WRITING TO USG TO BE PASSING SANCTION ON SOVEREIGN MEMBER OF ITS ORGANIZATION. I STRESSED THAT USG IN NO WAY CHALLENGED GOG OR OAU RIGHTS TO SAY, WRITE OR NOT WRITE WHAT THEY PLEASED BUT THAT USG HAD ALSO SOVERIGN RIGHT TO ISSUE EXPORT LICENSE. AFTER FURTHER FRUITLESS DISCUSSION COVERING OTHER ASPECTS MENTIONED IN NEW YORK, BONGO BROUGHT MATTER TO A HEAD BY PROPOSING FOLLOWING SOLUTION: HE WOULD WRITE ANOTHER LETTER TO SECGEN OAU RESTATING HIS CASE AND HIS OWN CLEAR INTENTIONS FOR APPROPRIATE ACTION BY OAU AND THAT SECGEN EKANGAKI WOULD THEN REPLY IN WRITING TO BONGO GIVING OAU'S CONCURRENCE. COPIES OF BOTH LETTERS WOULD THEN BE SENT UNDER COVER OF LETTER TO AMERICAN AMBASSADOR

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 LIBREV 00530 01 OF 02 301858Z

FOR FORWARDING TO WASHINGTON IN ORDER TO SETTLE MATTER. EKANGAKI READILY AGREED, STATING THAT HE WOULD OF COURSE REPLY TO ANY LETTER SENT TO HIM BY CHIEF OF STATE OF MEMBER NATION OF OAU. I STATED THAT I WOULD NATURALLY FORWARD ANY LETTERS GIVEN TO ME BUT WAS NOT IN ANY POSITION TO SAY WHAT USG REACTION WOULD BE. MEETING WAS THEREUPON TERMINATED.

4. EARLY THIS MORNING (APRIL 30) PERSONAL COUNSELOR OF
PRESIDENT BONGO CAME TO SEE ME TO DELIVER THE TWO LETTERS

WHICH FOLLOW (COMPLIMENTARY OMITTED):

5. LETTER FROM PRESIDENT BONGO TO SECGEN OAU:

QUOTE. I HAVE THE HONOR TO BRING TO YOUR ATTENTION
FOR APPROPRIATE ACTION MY DECISION TO PURCHASE IN U.S. DC-8-63
TYPE PLANE FOR MY PERSONAL USE.

DURING MY STAY IN NEW YORK, I INFORMED YOUR PERMANENT
REPRESENTATIVE OF THIS PROJECT IN A LETTER DATED APRIL 13, 1974
WHICH WAS SENT FOR INFORMATION TO AMERICAN AMBASSADOR IN
GABON.

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PAGE 01 LIBREV 00530 02 OF 02 301907Z

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-14 L-03 EB-11 INR-10 SS-20 DRC-01

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P 301432Z APR 74

FM AMFVBASSY LIBREVILLE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5382

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY

C O N F I D A N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 LIBREVILLE 0530

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, ETRN, GB,SRUS
SUBJ: PRESIDENT
BONGO'S DECISION TO PURCHASE DC-8 IN U.S.

REF: STATE 077438

YOU WILL FIND ATTACHED COPIES OF THIS CORRESPONDENCE.
THIS PLANE WILL BE OPERATED AND MAINTAINED BY UTA
AFTER REQUIRED REMODELING HAS BEEN COMPLETED IN FRANCE.

BY THE WORD OPERATION I MEAN THAT THE FLIGHT CREW
WILL BE COMPOSED OF UTA PERSONNEL AT MY PERSONAL DISPOSAL.

I INFORM YOU FURTHER THAT GOG HAS DECIDED TO TRANSFORM
INNER QUOTE QUOTE TRANSGABON END INNER QUOTE INTO A NEW
COMPANY INNER QUOTE AIR GABON END INNER QUOTE FINANCED
AS FOLLOWS: GOG 60 PERCENT, UTA 20 PERCENT, AND AIR
AFRIQUE 20 PERCENT. ALBER BERNARD BONGO. END QUOTE.

6. LETTER FROM SECGEN OAU TO PRESIDENT BONGO:

QUOTE. I HAVE THE HONOR TO ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT OF
YOUR LETTER OF THIS DATE BY WHICH YOU INFORM THE OAU
OF YOUR DECISION TO BUY IN THE U.S. A DC-8-63 TYPE PLANE
FOR YOUR PERSONAL USE.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 LIBREV 00530 02 OF 02 301907Z

THE OAU TAKES NOTE OF THIS INFORMATION WHICH DEMON-
STRATES ONCE AGAIN THE RECIPROCAL COLLABORATION IN MATTERS
OF INFORMATION WHICH SO HAPPILY EXIST BETWEEN YOUR
GOVERNMENT AND OUR ORGANIZATION. NZO EKANGAKI. END QUOTE.

7. COMMENT: THE REPLY OF SECGEN OAU (FOR REASONS HE
GAVE EARLIER) OBVIOUSLY NOT VERY SATISFACTORY FROM POINT
OF VIEW USG. FINAL DECISION IN MATTER CAN OBVIOUSLY
BE MADE ONLY IN WASHINGTON WHERE ALL ELEMENTS CAN BE
PROPERLY EVALUATED. I FEEL IT INCUMBENT UPON ME,
HOWEVER, TO POINT OUT FOLLOWING FACTS AS SEEN FROM
VANTAGE POINT OF THIS POST:

A. PRESIDENT BONGO CLEARLY FEELS VERY STRONGLY
ABOUT THIS MATTER (IN WHICH HIS PERSONAL PRESTIGE HAS
BECOME INVOLVED) AND WILL CERTAINLY REACT VERY
NEGATIVELY TO ANY U.S. TURNDOWN.

B. BONGO CURRENTLY NEGOTIATING WITH PANAM FOR
CONTRACT TO SET UP AIR GABON AS INTERNATIONAL AIRLINE.
I HAD LONG TALK YESTERDAY AFTERNOON WITH PANAM DIRECTOR,
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, GEORGE B.E. HAMBLETON
CURRENTLY IN LIBREVILLE TO PURSUE NEGOTIATIONS STARTED IN
NEW YORK DURING BONGO'S RECENT TRIP. PANAM REPRESENTATIVE
INDICATED HIS COMPANY VERY INTERESTED, WAS MAKING STUDY
AND EXPECTED EVENTS TO MOVE FAST. HE SAID HE DID NOT
THINK FRENCH WERE YET AWARE OF PROPOSAL AND THAT IF IT
FELL THROUGH BONGO WOULD DOUBTLESS TURN TO AIR FRANCE.

C. MORRISON-KNUDSEN BID FOR PART OF CONSTRUCTION OF
BOTH FIRST AND SECOND LEGS OF TRANSGABON RAILROAD STILL
PENDING. BONGO TOLD ME IN NEW YORK THAT HE WANTED M-K

INVOLVED. WE KNOW, HOWEVER, FROM WRITTENDOCUMENTS
GIVEN TO ME BY RAWIRI IN NEW YORK (WHICH I HAVE TO AF/C)
UPON INSTRUCTIONS FROM BONGO THAT FRANCO-GERMAN CONSORTIUM
AS WELL AS VION PERSONALLY DO NOT WANT M-K IN AT ALL AND
ARE FIGHTING IT.

D. TAMS PROPOSAL TO SERVE AS PART OF MULTINATIONAL
CONSORTIUM FOR ENGINEERING WORK ON TRANSGABON IS
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PAGE 03 LIBREV 00530 02 OF 02 301907Z

ALSO PENDING AND EXPECTED TO BE ACTED UPON IN NEXT FEW
WEEKS. CONCEIVABLE THAT TAMS COULD BE SHUT OUT (OR REPLACED
BY JAPANESE FIRM WHICH WE KNOW HAS ALREADY INDICATED
INTEREST) WITH OBVIOUS CONSEQUENCES ON POSSIBLE CONTRACTS
FOR U.S. FIRMS BIDDING ON RAILROAD.

3. BETHLEHEM STEEL CONCESSION (50 PERCENT OF AS YET
UNEXPLOITED IRON ORE) IS CURRENTLY UNDER SEVERE
SCRUTINY (AS EVIDENCED BY BONGO LETTER TO SOMIFER, COPY OF
WHICH GIVEN TO AF/C) AND MAY WELL BE WITHDRAWN IN PART OR
IN TOTALITY.

F. GOG UNQUESTIONABLY PLANS FURTHER PURCHASES OF PLANES
WHEN AIR GABON BECOMES INTERNATIONAL AIRLINE AND THESE
COULD BE MADE IN U.S. OR ELSEWHERE.

G. GENERAL ELECTRIC HAS VERY RECENTLY EVINCED GREAT
INTEREST IN BIDDING ON LOCOMOTIVE LOT FOR TRANSGABON
RAILROAD AND HAS ASKED FOR AND OBTAINED FROM EMBASSY
FAME OF LOCAL GABONESE REPRESENTATIVE WHO CAN PRESS
THEIR CASE.

8. DESPITE MANY CLIFFHANGING PROBLEMS OVER PAST FEW
YEARS, I HAVE NEVER PRESSED PANIC BUTTON SINCE I HAVE
BEEN IN GABON AND I AM NOT DOING SO NOW. I DO NOT
PREDICT DRAMATIC BREAK IN U.S.-GABON RELATIONS
OR EVEN THAT ANY, SOME OR ALL OF THE CONTINGENCIES MENTIONED
IN PRECEDING PARAGRAPH COULD DEVELOP IN MANNER CONTRARY
TO U.S. INTERESTS. I DO STRONGLY BELIEVE TWO THINGS,
HOWEVER, BASED ON MY PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF PRESIDENT
BONLP, SHOULD WE REFUSE EXPORT LICENSE: (1) FRIENDLY
AND CLOSE U.S.-GABONESE RELATIONS WHICH HAVE PAINSTAKINGLY
BEEN DEVELOPED OVER PAST SEVERAL YEARS WILL BE SERIOUSLY
DAMAGED, AND (2) THERE IS REAL RISK THAT SOME OF DECISIONS
REFERRED TO ABOVE (ALONG WITH POSSIBLY OTHERS) COULD BE
TAKEN TO DISADVANTAGE OF U.S. NATIONAL INTERESTS.
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